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FACTORS RELATED TO CITIZEN, ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING.

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BASED ON A STUDY OF THREE COMMUNITIES, GENERALIZATIONS AND PROPOSITIONS WERE PRESENTED ON THE TOPIC OF EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING. THE INTERACTIONS OF FOUR GROUPS--(1) NON-SCHOOL CITIZENS OF THE COMMUNITY, (2) CITIZENS WHO HOLD OFFICIAL POSITIONS IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION, (3) SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, AND (4) SCHOOL TEACHERS--WERE ANALYZED TO SHOW THEIR RELEVANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS TO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. THE CONCLUSIONS INDICATED THAT EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING WAS A POLITICAL PROCESS, INVOLVING THE INTERACTIONS, VALUES, ASPIRATIONS, AND INTERESTS OF VARIOUS GROUPS. HOWEVER IT WAS CONCLUDED THAT EDUCATIONAL POLITICS REMAINS RELATIVELY UNPREDICTABLE. (RS)

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FACTORS RELATED TO CITIZEN, ADMINISTRATOR AND TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

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February 12, 1965

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To understand some of the problems of local educational decision-making, the interactions of four groups must be analyzed. These are 1) the non-school citizens of the community, 2) the citizens who hold official positions in the school organization, 3) school administrators, and 4) school teachers.

Both reason and a considerable body of empirical evidence suggest that each group has some relevance for educational decision-making. In the paragraphs that follow, I intend to state some generalizations about the relationships of each of these groups to educational decision-making. These propositions are founded upon a limited amount of empirical evidence, and I suggest them as hypotheses that need to be further explored. Data obtained over the past decade from community studies made through the Institute of Community Studies at the University of Oregon and more recently a study of three communities currently in process by Professor Roland Pellegrin and myself are the basis for the discussion.

Citizen Participation

There is some evidence to suggest that active participants in community affairs specialize in particular aspects of community life. There are relatively few citizens who are actively involved simultaneously in several phases of community affairs, and those who generally occupy positions of considerable influence which results from their relating themselves to broad arenas of civic activity. Few, if any, of the citizens achieving positions of general influence within the community have done so as a result of their participation in educational affairs. General community influence seems to be more closely associated with prominence in economic and governmental affairs than in educational affairs, which may be at most

a side interest of the general influentials. Citizens who are generally influential appear to have obtained their positions of prestige and influence within the community as a result of activities designed to enhance the economic well being both of themselves and of the community. They do not see education as instrumental towards the attainment of this goal.

The citizens who are influential in educational affairs in the three communities which we are currently studying do not occupy places of the highest prestige or influence in the community. They do not appear to seek positions of over-all prestige and influence in governmental affairs. They are interested in social service and welfare activities, and they see educational activities as an important outlet for their concerns both for their own children and for all children in general. As a result of their welfare orientations and their commitment to education as a means for helping individuals improve themselves and their lots in society, they readily become a supporting public for educational administrators. This is true for several reasons.

First, they view the values and goals of educators as congruent with their own. Educators, too, appear to be committed to a social service or welfare orientation, and they frequently emphasize their concern for the welfare of the status of children. Under the circumstances, they form a community of interests with the group of citizens who have similar attitudes, values, and aspirations.

Second, the educators have control over essential information which the educationally-oriented citizens of the community need to achieve their goals. These people recognize the extent to which the educator has knowledge of the educational process, the extent of his understanding of

educational programs, and his relationship to professional organizations which help him understand how local educational facilities can be improved. For the local citizen the educator is the link with the broader educational society beyond the community, and, consequently, he helps the local citizens understand what is happening in the outside world.

Third, the educator has control over sanctions which are important to the welfare-oriented citizen. The educator is the gatekeeper of public morality relative to education. To oppose the educator or show indifference to the school program is often tantamount to being opposed to education.

It should be noted that dedicated as these citizens are to education and consistent as they are in the support of educational proposals, they are not able to bring stability to the political affairs of the local school district. It appears as though they lack both the desire and the skill to become wielders of political power. Under the circumstances, they are not able to mediate disputes or resolve issues. The degree of their commitment to public education arouses fears that they are the captives of the professional educators and cannot understand fully the serious impact which educational matters may have upon some areas of community concern. At times they are able to obtain the support of power holders in the community and secure a favorable response on the part of a broader public. But in the three communities that we have studied, the power holders do not necessarily become so deeply committed to any educational issue that they could jeopardize their goals and ambitions in other arenas of concern by being identified with controversial educational

matters. We have observed that even when some of them are closely identified with school board members and school administrators, in a highly charged emotional atmosphere they are likely to reserve judgment on the issues, only appear at a later date to advocate compromise solutions which restore stability in educational affairs.

The Participation of Citizens Who Hold Official Positions in School Organizations

There is some evidence that official governing bodies become reference groups for their members. It is not at all unusual for citizens to be elected to city councils, planning commissions, and school boards with some serious reservations about current patterns of operations but become extremely defensive and protective about those operations after they have served for a brief period of time. One reason for this cooptation of individuals is the fact that the official body has become a reference group which has developed a particular ideology and which has measured its relationships with other groups in the community in terms of their degree of acceptance or rejection of the dominating ideology of the governing body. As one member of a planning commission informed us, newcomers on the planning commission were not very valuable contributors to the commission until they had become fully informed and accepted the principles for which the planning commission was established. Ideology has the function of creating unity and solidarity within a particular group, but it is also instrumental as a devisive force in relation to external groups.

An ideology, first, arouses a need for the socialization of new members. The introduction of new members to the group poses threats to the unity

and solidarity of the functioning of the group. Consequently, individuals must become socialized so as to perform in accordance with the role expectations of the reference group itself. The function of socializing new board members is, in part, the responsibility of the superintendent of schools, but it is also assumed as part of the functions of the older school board members who tend to be protective of the values for which the school board stands. As a result of the socialization process and the school board becoming a reference group for its members, it usually becomes a closed, self-perpetuating group.

As a result of these forces, there is a division established between the school board and other groups within the community. Their relations are frequently characterized by some distrusts and suspicions developing on both sides. The school board member does not "look" at problems with the same perspective as outsiders, who, in turn, are unable to view problems with the same degree of concern for the educational functions as does the school board. School board members, as Sieber has pointed out, have a tendency to become interpreters of the school to the community, rather than representatives of the community in school policy matters.

The separation of school board members from the rest of the community makes them a vulnerable target for disaffected groups within the community. Consequently, a serious problem in educational decision-making arises from the fact that the community may look upon the school board members as serving interests which are not entirely congruent with the welfare of the community and its inhabitants.

These factors may reduce the effectiveness of the school board in resolving conflict in the community. Because school board members are placed in a defensive position as the protagonists of a partisan point of view, they are frequently embroiled in conflict and can communicate with all levels of the community only with great difficulty.

Participation of School Administrators

Our studies have produced some conflicting data relative to the role of school administrators in community affairs. In the first place, school administrators emerge as extremely powerful within the educational arena. This evidence is not entirely consistent with other studies. The school administrator is a key person for the resolution of issues and for the determining of paths that will be followed within the school organization. It is also recognized that the school administrator is extremely influential in obtaining consent for his recommendations from the school board, and, consequently, he plays a vital role with respect to the formulation of educational policies.

His power with respect to community issues affecting education is based upon three factors. First, he has control over a considerable amount of expert knowledge which school board members and citizens of the community need for the formulation of educational policies. The manner in which he conveys educational information directs their attention to those facets of the situation which he feels are significant and, to a large extent, determines the manner in which the decision will be made.

Second, he has control over vast educational resources including the professional knowledge of the staff members. Consequently, he can

direct those resources in such a way as to point inevitably toward the nature of the outcome that he sees as significant.

Third, it is recognized that the superintendent has the power to invoke certain types of sanctions against the community if it does not do his will. For instance, he has a powerful leverage in that he communicates directly with state or regional accrediting agencies. From the information he provides to them, he can obtain favorable or unfavorable actions toward the local schools. Under the circumstances, it is possible for him to bring outside pressures to bear upon the local community to enforce his wishes.

Although the school administrator is highly influential within the educational arena, he is relatively lacking in influence outside the educational arena. He is rarely mentioned by respondents as having influence in general community affairs. He is considered a specialist who can speak with authority within the realm of his profession but is not called upon to do so in other arenas of concern.

His effectiveness also appears to be reduced by the fact that he tends to identify himself with a comparatively narrow segment of the community. He joins civic luncheon clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, and the more respectable lodges or churches within the community. He is, thus, identified with the managerial and proprietary perspective and develops the appearance of being closely associated with people involved in influential positions in business and governmental affairs.

There are, however, some deep-seated problems associated with his identifications with this group in the community. These identifications make it difficult for him to communicate effectively with individuals who are not

among the proprietary groups because they look upon the superintendent as representing points of view that are not entirely congenial to their own interests. At the same time, these associations set him apart from his teaching staff, who are unable to maintain the same connections.

Two other kinds of problems also result for the superintendent. In our studies, it is revealed that in identifying himself closely with the proprietary groups whose primary interests lie in government and business rather than in education, the superintendent maintains a relationship with individuals and groups which have low probability for accepting educational functions as their primary concerns. We have noted how these groups have sometimes remained aloof or indifferent to educational issues when their support was vitally needed. It is also indicative that the superintendent is rarely more than a marginal member of these groups. He appears to lack sufficient identification with their values and prestige symbols to enable him to become a fully accepted participant in their circles. Since these groups place high value upon material consideration, the superintendent who works for a salary and does not give evidence of proficiency in the business world cannot maintain the full respect of the other members.

A last factor that emerges about the superintendent is that he is perceived by citizens of the community as belonging primarily to the educational profession and have little if any commitment to the community. He is merely a sojourner in the community in which he resides, and he can pack his suitcases and move with the slightest trouble. Under the circumstances, the community can never be sure that he is examplifying values which are significant to them. He may always be so involved as a

partisan, so fully committed to the educational profession, that if a choice has to be made between community values and professional values, the probabilities favor his acceptance of professional values.

School Teachers in the Community

Little research has actually been done about the role of the school teachers in community affairs. There are some interesting data that are currently under analysis in our study of three communities. Teachers, on the whole, tend to be non-power aspirants in local community affairs. They do not seek positions of influence or prestige, but, it is also recognized that they have the potential for exercising considerable influence over educational decision-making within the community because of their close proximity to individuals and groups to whom the educational function is of primary importance. The reference orientations of the superintendent tend to limit his identification with parents and some of the groups they represent, but the reference orientations of the teachers and their daily life activities within the classroom tend to identify them closely witha broader range of groups within the community. Under the circumstances, they constitute an important group who can sway dedicated people either for or against school related issues.

Teacher appears to see for themselves only limited activity in educational decision-making. They appear to want to be involved in decisions affecting their direct benefits and immediate classroom management problems, but they have low motivation for participation in other educational or community decisions. They are willing to let these decisions be made by other individuals except as they see themselves adversely affected by the

kinds of policies proposed, in which case they have sometimes engaged in at least covert educational campaigns.

It is also evident that teachers are frequently perceived as "the educational authorities" by parents whose primary face-to-face contact with school personnel is the teacher of the classroom in which their children are enrolled. Because of this close face-to-face relationship with parents, teachers can stimulate either support or lack of confidence in the policies and measures proposed by school boards and administrators. On the whole, however, teachers appear to be reluctant to take advantage of the situation, and there are powerful controls within the profession to prevent their playing any role in local community affairs respecting education that is not fully sanctioned by their administrators.

The teachers also have the common disability of being only temporary residents of the community. Consequently, there is suspicion that they, too, are more highly dedicated to professional than to community values and if they must make a choice, they will choose those decisions which are most closely related to their own economic welfare.

Conclusions

It is apparent that educational decision-making is a political process, involving the interactions, values, aspirations and interests of various groups. Instability in educational affairs appears to result from failure of generally influential citizens in the community to evidence direct involvement in educational decision-making. The citizens who are influential in educational affairs are dependent upon educators for assistance in the accomplishment of their ends and the establishment of

their goals. Educators exercise primary influence over the internal affairs of the schools, and, under normal circumstances, also over the external decision-making. They do not occupy positions of influence or prestige within the community, and they are not always accepted as promoting the interests of the community. At best, educational politics remain relatively unpredictable.